

What is Circle?

The Circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversations for thousands of years. In some areas of the world this tradition remains intact, but in some societies it has been nearly forgotten. As Christina Baldwin describes, circle has come back to take us forward. The circle way is a modern methodology that calls on this tradition and helps people gather in conversations that fulfil their potential for dialogue, replenishment, and wisdom-based change.

- Circle is a shape where everyone can see and hear each other.
- Circle is a group process that supports every voice into collaborative decision-making.
- Circle is an experience of sharing story, inviting diverse thinking, and encouraging creative problem solving.

One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues and timeframes. It is a chance for people to stop, to sit down, and to listen to each other. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a means for “checking in” and “checking out” or a way of making decisions together, particularly decisions based on consensus.

General Flow of the Circle

- Intention
- Welcome/Start-point
- Centre and Check-in/Greeting
- Agreements
- Three Principles and Three Practices
- Guardian of the Process
- Check-Out and Farewell

Principles of Circle

- Leadership rotates among all circle members
- Responsibility is shared for the quality of the experience
- Reliance on Wholeness, rather than on any personal agenda

Practices of Circle

- Speak with intention: noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
- Listen with attention: respectful of the learning process for all members of the group.
- Tend the well-being of the group: remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.



Circle Agreements

The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:

- We will hold stories or personal material in confidentiality.
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can.
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy. We agree to pause at a signal, and to call for that signal when we feel the need to pause.

Forms of Council

The circle commonly uses three forms of council: talking piece, conversation and reflection.

- Talking piece council is often used as part of check-in, check-out, and whenever there is a desire to slow down the conversation, collect all voices and contributions, and be able to speak without interruption.
- Conversation council is often used when reaction, interaction, and an interjection of new ideas, thoughts and opinions are needed.
- Reflection, or silent council gives each member time and space to reflect on what is occurring, or needs to occur, in the course of a meeting. Silence may be called so that each person can consider the role or impact they are having on the group, or to help the group realign with their intention, or to sit with a question until there is clarity.

